GOVERNMENT OF INDIA
COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY
LOK SABHA

UNSTARRED QUESTION NO:914
ANSWERED ON:29.11.2005
WTO MEET AT GENEVA
Sethi Shri Arjun Charan;Tripathy Shri Braja Kishore

Will the Minister of COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY be pleased to state:

(a) whether WTO Ministerial meeting at Geneva has discussed the issue of import duty on Agriculture sector;

(b) if so, the details in this regard and outcome thereof;

(c) whether the interest of Indian agriculturist would be protected in international market and;

(d) if so, the steps taken by the Government in this regard?

Answer

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY (SHRI E.V.K.S. ELANGOVAN)

(a) & (b): Under the on-going negotiations on the Agreement on Agriculture in the World Trade Organisation (WTO), market access commitments, inter alia, through lower bound duties on imports of agricultural products have been under discussion since the negotiations were launched in January 2000, the negotiating mandate in respect of which was elaborated through the Doha Ministerial Declaration of 14 November 2001. Through the General Council Decision of 1 August 2004 (the `Framework Agreement`) it has been further agreed that the objective of substantial improvements in market access will be achieved, inter alia, through a tiered tariff reduction formula such that products bound at higher levels be subjected to higher cuts. Special and differential treatment for developing countries will be integral to all aspects of the negotiations. The WTO Ministerial meeting scheduled to be held at Hong Kong, China, from 13-18 December 2005, would among other issues, also discuss the issues involved in the agriculture negotiations, including import duty reductions. Ministerial level meetings have been held in various configurations, including the G-33, which last met on 12 October 2005, the G-20 on 12 October and 7 November 2005, and the G-4 on 22 November 2005, in Geneva. However, divergences have remained on various aspects of the market access commitments, including the quantum of reductions in tariffs.

(c) and (d): To safeguard the interests of Indian agriculturists, India, along with other Members of the WTO holding similar interests and concerns, has demanded that all forms of export subsidies must be eliminated by a credible end-date, and all forms of trade-distorting support provided by developed countries to their agriculture sector must be substantially reduced. India has also taken the stand that tariff reductions should be made from the bound rates on the basis of a tiered formula as provided in the Framework Agreement. The G-20, of which India is a Member, favours straight linear cuts within each tier of the tariff reduction formula, with proportionately lower commitments by developing Members as compared with those by developed Members. India has also taken the stand that meaningful and operational special and differential treatment for developing countries must be integral to all aspects of the negotiations, including the instruments of Special Products and new Special Safeguard Mechanism to ensure food security, livelihood security and address the rural development needs of poor farmers in developing countries.